

Draft Market Squid Fishery Management Plan Environmental Document

Executive Summary

In terms of volume and revenue, market squid is one of the most important commercial fisheries in the State of California, generating millions of dollars of income annually from domestic and foreign sales. Market squid is important to the recreational fishery and is forage for marine mammals, seabirds, and fish, including fish taken for commercial and recreational purposes. The growing international market for squid and the declining squid production in other parts of the world has resulted in an increased demand for California market squid, which has led to more efficient vessels entering the fishery and increased processing capacity.

In 1997, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 364 to establish a moratorium on California's commercial market squid fishery. The initial three-year moratorium placed a cap on the number of vessels in the squid fishery, established a \$2,500 permit fee to fund a California Department of Fish and Game (Department) study of the fishery, and provided the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) with interim regulatory authority over the fishery for the duration of the moratorium. This interim fishery management program generated approximately two million dollars, which was directed into squid fishery research, management, enforcement, and related activities. As part of this process, a Squid Fishery Advisory Committee (SFAC), made up of resource stakeholders, and a Squid Research Scientific Committee (SRSC), consisting of many of the world's leading squid fishery scientists, were established to advise the Director on recommendations for squid conservation and management and to provide input on the development of research protocols.

In 2001, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 209 which provided for the management of the market squid fishery by the Commission. The bill required the Commission to manage the squid fishery under the Marine Life Management Act (MLMA) on and after 1 January 2002 and required the Commission to adopt a market squid fishery management plan under the MLMA by 31 December 2002. It also authorized the Commission to set the fees for commercial market squid vessel and light boat owners permits, and recommended limiting entry into the fishery, establishing catch limits, and maintaining a research and monitoring program to assess the health of the fishery. In April 2002, the Department provided the preliminary draft Market Squid Fishery Management Plan (MSFMP) for review and comment by the public. The Commission will consider adoption of the management plan in the fall of 2003, with implementation in the 2004/2005 fishing season.

The goal of the MSFMP is to curtail rapid expansion of the squid fishery, ensure sustainability of the resource, and reduce the potential for overfishing in a manner that minimizes adverse effects on habitat to the extent practicable. The MSFMP establishes a fisheries management program for market squid and procedures by which the Commission will manage the market squid resource and the various fishery components. It also sets the limits of management authority for the Commission when acting under the MSFMP. Management measures implementing the MSFMP, which directly control fishing activities, must be consistent with the goals and objectives of the MSFMP, MLMA, and other applicable laws. These management actions are to be considered regularly with an exception that provides for more timely Commission action

under certain specific conditions. Procedures in the MSFMP do not affect the authority of the Director to take emergency regulatory action under Fish and Game Code (FGC) §7710. Since squid is included in the Federal Coastal Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan (CPSFMP) as a monitored species, the MSFMP framework structure is consistent with the federal management by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) outlined in the CPSFMP.

While the draft MSFMP describes several management components, the Department recommends continuing existing market squid regulations while adding new restrictions to the fishery. The proposed restrictions include a moderate limited entry program, area and time closures around Santa Barbara and Anacapa islands to protect several species of nesting seabirds from light disturbances, permit fees to support a monitoring program, and the establishment of a single advisory committee.

The MSFMP, Section 1, describes 17 option categories for management of the market squid fishery based on four management components; fishery control rules, squid harvest replenishment areas, restricted access, and other concerns. The proposed project and alternative options are grouped around the four components of the proposed project.

Fishery Control Rules

- Seasonal statewide catch limitation
- Egg escapement method to monitor the squid fishery
- Daily trip limits
- Weekend closures
- Monitoring program (e.g. port sampling, logbook analysis)
- Live bait fishery and incidental catch

Squid Harvest Replenishment Areas

Restricted Access

- Limited entry and capacity goals
- Initial issuance of market squid fleet permits
- Annual permit fees
- Transferability of permits for market squid vessels
- Transferability of permits for brail boats
- Transferability of permits for light boats
- Permit transfer fees

Other Concerns

- Lighting gear restrictions
- Area closures for seabird protection
- Advisory committee

Some of the management option categories, e.g., permit fees, monitoring the fishery (using egg escapement), port sampling and logbook analyses, and establishment of one consolidated advisory committee, are not further discussed in this Environmental Document for the following reasons.

Permit fees are a funding mechanism for fishery management that already exists as part of the status quo environment. The incremental difference between the current statutory fee of \$400 and the proposed regulatory fee of \$400 to \$5000 is an aspect of the restricted access program, whose physical impacts to the environment are discussed at length in Chapters 4 and 5. No adverse environmental impacts are anticipated by the imposition of a higher fee. Monitoring the fishery, port sampling, and logbook analysis are information gathering activities that also already exist as part of the pre-project status quo environment. Monitoring the fishery is accomplished through port sampling and is undertaken according to protocols developed cooperatively between the Department and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Port sampling occurs after the vessel docks and while the catch is landed; thus, no adverse environmental impacts are reasonably expected from this activity. Similarly, logbook analysis occurs in the Department offices, after the logbooks have been submitted by the fishermen; again, no adverse environmental impacts have been identified from this activity. Finally, the Squid Research Scientific Committee and the Squid Fishery Advisory Committee already exist pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 8426(a) as part of the status quo environment. The proposed consolidation of these two bodies into one represents a strictly administrative or organizational change. As the name indicates, the role of the committee is advisory, and it possesses no authority to make decisions that translate into an environmental effect. Accordingly, no adverse environmental impacts have been identified from this activity.